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RUEHTV/AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV 1266  
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DEPARTMENT FOR PA, NEA/ARN, INR/IC/CD, INR/S:STHIBEAULT AND  
JMCCARTER, VOA NEWS CA, NEA/PPD:CBOURGEOIS, DBENZE AND  
AFERNANDEZ, IIP/G/NEA-SA RWINCHESTER  
WHITE HOUSE FOR NSC  
CENTCOM FOR CCPA

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SUBJECT: Damascus Media Reaction: Syria/Venezuela, Syria/Italy,  
Syria/Germany, Syria/Denmark, Kofi Annan's Middle East Tour  
(8/30)

¶1. Summary: Syrian papers today led with the visit to Syria by Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez. Banner headlines reported the warm welcome prepared for President Chavez and featured the press statements made by President Asad and President Chavez at Damascus airport during which Chavez noted that both Venezuela and Syria share the same political vision saying "we are two countries and two peoples resisting and confronting the United States' imperialistic aggression." "We are here in Damascus to call for peace," Chavez told Syrian state television. Chavez said that during his visit to Syria officials of both governments will sign a document opposing Washington's aggression" in the Middle East.

Papers also reported that President Asad received a telephone call from Italian Prime Minister Romano Prodi. The conversation dealt with the latest developments in Lebanon in light of the start of the deployment of international forces in south Lebanon. The talks dealt also with the situation in the region and issues of mutual concerns and the circulating ideas regarding peace in the Middle East. Prime Minister Prodi explained Italy's decision to take part in the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) and stressed the importance of concrete gestures to restart dialogue and cement stability in the region."

Papers also reported FM Walid Mouallem's meeting with Christian Hop, personal representative of the Danish Foreign Minister to the Middle East, who called for preserving cease-fire in Lebanon, achieving a full Israeli withdrawal, and ending Israeli siege on Lebanon. Talks focused on the situation in the region especially, in Lebanon, in the light of UN 1701 resolution.

Papers also reported that Foreign Minister Mouallem received a phone call German FM Frank-Walter Steinmeier, which touched upon the situation in Lebanon particularly after the UN UNSC resolution 1701. Viewpoints were identical regarding gearing efforts to establish a just and comprehensive peace in the Middle East and Syria's role to realize stability in the region.

Papers also reported that Foreign Minister Walid Mouallem talked on the phone with German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter

Steinmeier. Discussion focused on the situation in Lebanon in light of UNSC Resolution 1701 and the need to maintain the cease-fire. The two sides agreed to intensify efforts to bring about a just and comprehensive peace in the Middle East. The two sides agreed also on the importance of continuing dialogue and contacts in light of Syria's constructive role in achieving stability of the region.

End of summary.

**12. Selected Headlines:**

"President Asad receives President Hugo Chavez. President Asad: Chavez's visit is historical; we are looking forward to see its outcome. President Chavez: We have the same political vision; we resist the imperialist aggression together. President Asad talks on the phone with Italian PM Prodi and receives Egyptian delegation" (Government-owned Al-Thawra, 8/30)

"Foreign Minister Mouallem reviews developments in the region with Special Envoy of Danish Foreign Minister, and discusses with German Foreign Minister the situation in Lebanon and necessity of intensifying efforts to establish a just and comprehensive peace" (Government-owned Tishreen, 8/30)

"UN SecGen Annan departs Lebanon with no guarantees on lifting siege the Israeli siege on Lebanon. Annan considers the Israeli siege on Lebanon as humiliation" (Government-owned Al-Thawra, 8/30)

**13. Editorial Block Quotes:**

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"A Last Minute Chance"

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Ali Qasim, a columnist in government-owned Al-Thawra, wrote (8/30): "UN Secretary General Kofi Annan's visit to the region provides a real opportunity for the international community to regain the initiative that it accepted to leave to American whims and to the extremist team in President Bush's administration, which dedicated the organization and the entire international community to serving Israel's ambitions and justifying its aggressiveness and occupation....

"The United Nations is facing a real credibility problem, especially among the peoples of the region, which felt, beyond any doubt, a clear imbalance in its principles and a declared double-standard approach toward the resolutions it adopts, especially when it comes to Israel.... Annan's tour comes after a series of events and developments that deeply affected the position toward the international organization, which appeared unable to play its role....

"UN Secretary General will sense, as the peoples of the region sensed, the extent of the threat that Israel poses through its aggressiveness and barbarism.... The UN impotence will only heighten the tension in the region."

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"Reactivating the UN Role"

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Adnan Ali, an editorialist in government-owned Al-Thawra, wrote (8/30): "Kofi Annan's Middle East tour will mark the beginning of a serious and effective presence for the international organization within the effort to establish peace and security in this troubled region, which long suffered, and is still suffering, from the negative and unfair interventions by the superpowers that have no respect for UN principles and Charter....

"Annan, as a person, enjoys much integrity and understands well

the issues of the region, but the superpowers that control the fates of nations, gave the United Nations a little chance to play an active, effective, and balanced role to resolve pending issues in the world, especially in this ever-volatile region....

"UN SecGen must adopt clear positions.... He must distinguish between the culprit and the victim.... We assume that Annan realizes that Israel is the source of all evils in the region and that its insistence to occupy Arab lands and its continuous attempts to subjugate the region and terrorize its peoples by force, are behind tensions and crises...."

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"Syria Cannot Be Isolated"

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Omar Jaftali, an editorialist in government-owned Tishreen, wrote (8/30): "Every foreign visitor to Damascus underlines Syria's vital role in the region and its peace....

"If we exclude the official American position, which served Israel's interests and not America's real interests, and which, therefore, caused anger and resentment among the peoples of the region and the world, the American, European, and international delegations that visited Damascus agreed with Syria that there is a major flaw in the American policy, one that prevents the United States from playing its supposed role as a superpower responsible for protecting the world's security, stability, and peace....

"Dialogue and exchange of views is very important to achieve a just and comprehensive peace in the region.... Syria cannot be

isolated, and its constructive and pivotal role is understood and appreciated by broad international circles, and this will definitely produce positive results in the future."

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"They Are Afraid of the Volume of Victory"

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Dr. Turki Saqr, a commentator in government-owned Tishreen, wrote (8/30): "Some people are still inflating the damage that Israel inflicted on Lebanon as a way of saying that Hezbollah did not win the battle with Israel.... Marginalizing Hezbollah's victory and heroic actions only serves Israel and its effort to impose capitulation on Arabs....

"These skeptics are disturbed not by the magnitude of the destruction, as they claim, but by the magnitude of the victory.... Their views can never affect the greatness of the victory that was achieved.... These people must have the courage to admit that much of the destruction that was inflicted on Lebanon was a result of their governments' negligence and inability to make the natural decision; namely, standing in the face of the aggression and the occupation from the beginning....

"Israel and the United States would not have continued with the aggression for 34 days without the suspicious silence of those Arabs and their blame for Hezbollah...."

Corbin